

The Promised Gospel

Romans 1:2



We began last week to look at Paul's salutation to the Romans. This morning we will make a slight advancement as we look at the end of verse one and verse two.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, Romans 1:1 NASB

In the very first verse of Romans Paul mentions the gospel. Then in verse 9 he mentions it again, "*preaching of the gospel of His Son*". He mentions it again in verse 15, "*I am eager to preach the gospel to you*". And he mentions it again in verse 16, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel*". In Paul's introduction 1:1-17 he mentions the gospel three times. I think it is safe to say that Romans is all about the gospel.

So what exactly is the "*gospel of God*" as Paul uses it? I think that when we think of the gospel we think of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NASB

To us this is the gospel; Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead. But is that all it's about? What did it mean to Paul's Roman audience? Is that an important question? Yes it is. We must understand the historical context if we are going to understand what Paul is saying. Historical analysis involves seeking knowledge of the setting and situation in which the books of the Bible were written. Too often we come from the ego-centric perspective that assumes that whatever the Bible says, it speaks specifically to us in our generation! Yet that hermeneutic ignores the historical context. When interpreting Scripture we must always be aware that every verse, every line, and every statement has just one interpretation, yet many applications.

The word "*Gospel*" is the translation of the Greek noun *euaggelion*, which means: "*good news*," and the Greek verb *euaggelizo* which means: "*to bring or announce good news*." Both words are derived from the noun *angelos*, which means: "*messenger*." In Classical Greek, a *euangelos* was one who brought a message of victory or other political or personal news that caused joy. In addition, *euagelizomai* (the middle voice form of the verb) meant: "*to speak as a messenger of gladness, to proclaim good news*". Further, the noun *euaggelion* became a technical term for the message of victory, though it was also used for a political or private message that brought joy.

To a Jew in Paul's day the word "*gospel*" looked back to Isaiah. The Greek verb *euaggelizo* is used in the LXX version in:

Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. Isaiah 40:9-10 NASB

How lovely on the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings

good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, They shout joyfully together; For they will see with their own eyes When the LORD restores Zion. Isaiah 52:7-8 NASB

That Paul sees Isaiah 52:7 as speaking of the euaggelion is made clear in:

How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" Romans 10:15 NASB

The messenger was to bring to Jerusalem the good news of deliverance from Babylon and the personal return of YHWH to deliver them from exile. So the Jews would hear Paul say that he was set apart as a messenger of the good news proclaiming the arrival of Messiah, Israel's anointed king, to bring God's people back from exile. They would understand that the salvific promises God made to Israel are now being fulfilled.

How would the Gentiles view the gospel? Was it good news to them of Israel's salvation, of her return from exile? No! In the Mediterranean world the fastest growing religion was the Imperial cult, the worship of Caesar. In ancient Rome, the phenomenon known as the Cult of Caesar arose from the worship of Roman emperors. A cornerstone of ancient Roman culture, the emperors of ancient Rome were considered gods across the Empire. Julius Caesar represents the epitome of the deification of ancient Roman emperors. In Rome itself the emperors did not claim full divine honors, but they did adopt the title "son of god"—the god in question being their recently deceased, and newly deified, predecessor.

Caesar was awarded the title of a *god* upon his return from the successful battle in Spain, during which the Pompeian's were crushed. Upon this victory, Caesar was elected dictator for life and made Roman consul for a period of ten years. He was declared to be a sacred being.

This produced the culture of Divus Iulius, that is, the deified Caesar. The term Iulius, refers to the month of July, which was named in honor of Caesar's birth upon his deification. Divus Iulius was made a god that was equivalent in power to the highest god Jupiter and he was decreed god of the Roman Empire. Temples and statues were built in his honor throughout Rome.

In 44 BCE, Caesar declared himself dictator for life and allowed a statue of himself to be built with the inscription, Deo Invicto, meaning "**to the unconquered god**". The statue became a symbol of his authority.

Caesar's power increased after his death. He was named Dictator Perpetuo, giving the deceased emperor jurisdiction over the earthly world from the other realm. Pillars and statues were erected in his honor and the cult of Caesar diffused throughout the Empire, reaching cities such as Alexandria.



As the mighty Roman Empire flourished and included a territory that ranged from Britain to the Euphrates and Germany to North Africa, the crucial question was how to keep it amalgamated. At first the worship of the goddess Roma, the spirit of Rome, was the unifying source. As time went on, the person who incarnated that spirit of Rome was the Emperor. He became regarded as a god and divine honors were paid to him. This was a voluntary thing at first. Then in time this Emperor worship became compulsory. Once a year a man had to go and burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar and say, "Caesar is Lord." You don't need a strong military presence to police an empire if the citizens are worshiping the emperor.

As the imperial cult grew, its "good news" was that Caesar, the son of God, was now the lord of the whole world, claiming allegiance from everybody in return for bringing salvation and justice to the world. Resistance was met with crucifixion. The system was based on sheer power.

The Greek word Lord is kurios, the word by which citizens of the Roman Empire acknowledged the divinity of Caesar. Within the empire there was a test phrase used to check the loyalty of the people. It was "Kyrios Kaiser," and it meant: "**Caesar is Lord.**"

A comparison of the “good news” of the Caesar cult with Paul’s words shows that Romans is, among other things, a deliberate parody of the pagan message. Paul’s readers in Rome must have understood this, and he must have intended them to. But Paul’s ideas do not derive from the Caesar cult. Rather, they confront it.

N.T. Wright says, *“When Paul refers to ‘the gospel’, he is not referring to a system of salvation, though of course the gospel implies and contains this, nor even to the good news that there now is a way of salvation open to all, but rather to the proclamation that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth has been raised from the dead and thereby demonstrated to be both Israel’s Messiah and the world’s true Lord. ‘The gospel’ is not ‘you can be saved, and here’s how’; the gospel, for Paul, is ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’.”*

“It is a royal summons to submission, to obedience, to allegiance; and the form that this submission and obedient allegiance takes is of course faith. That is what Paul means by ‘the obedience of faith’. Faith itself, defined conveniently by Paul as belief that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead, is the work of the Spirit, accomplished through the proclamation.”

Notice that Paul says that this gospel is *“of God.”* And it’s important that Paul say that because the Romans were used to hearing the *euangelion* of the Roman Empire, but the good news that Paul proclaimed was not from Caesar, it’s from God!

**For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.
12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:11-12 NASB**

The Christian gospel comes from God, not from man. This is a hugely important point, because we live in a pluralistic society that teaches us over and over again that all religions are basically the same, that we are all going to the same place, and that no religious system can be thought superior to any other system. This, of course, is nonsense, even on the face of it, but many people accept it as the truth. Paul’s makes it clear that the gospel is not the result of polling data or the work of a committee. It came as a revelation from Jesus Christ.

Paul’s apostolic call was in service to the gospel. The mention of the gospel causes Paul to elaborate on the content of the gospel in verses 2-4. The gospel is good news, but not new news:

which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, Romans 1:2 NASB

“Which” refers to the gospel in verse 1. In many ways, the gospel is old news because the prophets predicted that the Messiah would someday come and save his people. That means that the gospel is not a sudden expedient, or a theological novelty dreamed up at the last second by the Almighty. It was part of the plan of God from the beginning.

It was consistent with all that true Judaism believed and anticipated. It was not a revelation of something entirely new and unexpected, but a realization of that which had been promised.

Notice what Jesus said about the First Testament:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; John 5:39 NASB

Jesus said that the First Testament spoke about Him. Every sacrificial lamb spoke of the ultimate Lamb. Every verbal prophecy spoke of the time when the Messiah would come. All of the truth about restoration and the Kingdom spoke of what the Messiah would do.

In Luke 24 we find a story of Jesus and two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This is on the day of resurrection and these are two disciples who should have been back in Jerusalem excited about the resurrection of Jesus, but they weren’t. They were going the opposite direction towards Emmaus, discouraged and defeated because they didn’t understand what had taken place. They were walking down the road, going the opposite direction, discouraged, disgruntled and Jesus comes along beside them:

And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Luke 24:25 NASB

Foolish is from the Greek word *anoetos* [a-noy-a-tos] which means unintelligent. He is saying to these disciples, "Listen, you are not thinking. Then he says they are *"slow of heart."* He said they have been foolish and slow *"to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"*

Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. Luke 24:27 NASB

He goes back into the First Testament. The good news didn't begin when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The good news was announced beforehand by God through His prophets. If we would look to see what they had to say, it all pointed to Jesus Christ, the good news of God.

Paul taught the same thing that Jesus taught that the Scriptures foretell the gospel. Notice what Paul said to synagogue officials in Pisidian Antioch. He reviews for them the History of Israel and then he says:

"From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, Acts 13:23 NASB

Paul hammers this thought over and over, Jesus was promised in the Hebrew Scriptures. He goes on to say:

"Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. Acts 13:26-27 NASB

They didn't understand the prophets, and because of this they killed Jesus:

"When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. Acts 13:29 NASB

The word here translated *"carried out"* is from the Greek word *teleo*, the NKJV translates this *"fulfilled."* This is an important word. It indicates there was a prophecy fulfilled. In verse 33, it says that *"God has fulfilled this promise."* Who did God make all these promises to? Israel. God made these promises with Israel, and they are fulfilled in the Church, because the Church is the New Israel.

Paul shows that the Jews' rejection and killing of Jesus did not in any way thwart God's plan, but rather fulfilled it in exact accordance with Scripture. *"They carried out all that was written."* Paul goes on in Acts 13 to say:

"And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, Acts 13:32 NASB

Notice here that what Paul is preaching is the *"good news of the promise made to the fathers"*—what he is preaching is nothing new, it is all found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

"Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: Acts 13:40 NASB

Again what Paul spoke was what the Prophets had taught.

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, Acts 17:2 NASB

Paul was teaching the gospel in Thessalonica, but he was doing it from the Hebrew Scriptures. This is exactly what Paul taught in Caesarea:

"So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; Acts 26:22 NASB

Paul is saying that what he is preaching ALL comes from the First Testament. He is teaching the hope of Israel.

This is a problem for dispensationalists. They teach what Paul taught was not revealed in the First Testament. Dwight Pentecost, in his book *Things to Come*, on page 137 writes, *“The concept must stand that this whole age [he’s referring to the Church age] with its program was not revealed in the Old Testament, but constitutes a new program and a new line of revelation in this present age.”*

How can that be if Paul, who wrote half of the New Testament, says that he teaching nothing but what Moses and the Prophets taught. Who do we believe, Paul or Dwight Pentecost?

This is so important to understand because the majority of believers today hold to Dispensationalism, which teaches that the church is a **parenthesis** in God’s dealing with Israel. They teach that because Israel rejected Christ, God stopped his clock, so to speak, and is presently dealing with the Church. But he will in the future return to his dealings with Israel. But Paul said that the gospel is not new, it was taught through the First Testament.

Perhaps the most influential instrument of dispensational thinking was the [Scofield Bible](#) (1909) which included a commentary that interpreted prophetic texts according to a premillennial hermeneutic.

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. John 1:17 NASB

The Scofield reference Bible commenting on this verse says, *“The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation.”*

Legal obedience was never a condition of salvation. People were always saved by grace through faith. That is the ONLY way anybody can be saved. God has never altered His method.

Many dispensationalists teach that salvation by grace is a dispensation only for the New Testament period; it was offered to Gentiles as an interlude after the Jews had rejected Christ. Before the cross, they say, God had a different salvation formula for ancient Israel; and after the church age ends, God will offer Israel yet another dispensation—making it into a great kingdom of God again.

That both the Testaments offer the same gospel, is such an important doctrine in the Christian faith that I think we should also look at it a bit closer.

“And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. Genesis 17:11 NASB

What covenant was that sign of circumcision a token of? We find the answer in:

and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, Romans 4:11 NASB

Paul says that Abraham had *“the righteousness of the faith”*—that is, he was saved —when he was yet uncircumcised. And he was given that sign as a token that *“he might be the father of all who believe, without being circumcised.”* You see, God promised Abraham even back then that he would be the father of all believers, including those who are not of Jewish descent.

and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. Romans 4:12 NASB

Here, God makes it clear that national Israel is no exception. Abraham is the father of circumcision, the people of Israel, only to them who not only are circumcised, *but who also walk in the footsteps of Abraham* in having faith before he was circumcised. This statement belies those who claim that God had promised that He would save all of national Israel someday.

We can thus understand why God said:

"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. Genesis 17:4-5 NASB

The only way for Abraham to be the progenitor of many nations is for him to be the spiritual ancestor of the people of many nations. God further told Abraham:

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. Genesis 17:7 NASB

The word *"everlasting"* immediately tells us that *"your descendants"* refers to those who are in Christ because they are the only ones who will inherit the new heaven and the new earth. The Romans 4 parallel to Genesis 17:7 is verse 16. It reads:

For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, Romans 4:16 NASB

Here, the word *"promise"* is a synonym for "covenant." Having seen such a weighty commentary of [Genesis 17](#) in Romans 4, we can safely conclude that from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible offers only one gospel—salvation by grace through faith, which is the gift of God. Any suggestion that God has different dispensations for different peoples in different periods of history is altogether at odds with what God teaches.

Notice what Paul wrote to the Galatians:

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." Galatians 3:8 NASB

Here, the Bible is giving us a tremendous statement. It is saying that it has always been God's plan to save the heathen, the non-Jewish people, through faith in Jesus Christ. Foreseeing or anticipating, that the word of God announced in advance the Good News to Abraham by telling him, *"All nations shall be blessed in you."*

The Bible is thus saying that there is no difference between First Testament and New Testament believers. They are all saved by the same gospel of grace; they all have *"obtained a good report through faith."*

What was the *"gospel"* that was preached unto Abraham? It is identified in the specific quote of the Scripture that Paul gives: *"All the nations shall be blessed in you."* Paul says that this quote means that God was telling Abraham that all nations would have some in them that would be justified through faith.

Did Abraham understand what God meant by; **"ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU?"** God evidently explained to Abraham that through his decedents a righteous one would come who would redeem man from the curse and satisfy the justice of God. How do I know that? Jesus told me:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." John 8:56 NASB

Abraham believed that God would provide a redeemer to deal with man's sin:

And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"⁸ And Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. Genesis 22:7-8 NASB

I think that Abraham may have understood far more than we give him credit for.

To say that "Scripture foresaw" and preached the gospel beforehand is to personify Scripture. The written text is treated as a person who sees and speaks. Paul's personification of Scripture means that for him the written text expresses the voice of God: **What Scripture says, God says.**

We must grasp this! When we spend time in the Word, we are spending time with God. God speaks through His Word. Since this is true, shouldn't we be spending more time with God's Word? By just spending 15 minutes a day, you can read through the whole Bible in a year. Christians, if you don't have 15 minutes a day to devote to God...there is seriously something wrong with your priorities!

I believe that the Bible teaches the essential continuity of Israel and the church. The elect of all the ages are seen as one people, with one Savior, one destiny. This continuity can be shown by examining the few First Testament prophecies with their fulfillment. Dispensationalists admit that if the church can be shown to be fulfilling promises made to Israel, their system is doomed.

Ryrie writes, *"If the church is fulfilling Israel's promises as contained in the new covenant or anywhere in the Scriptures, then [dispensational] premillennialism is condemned."* (Ryrie, The Relationship of the new covenant to Premillennialism [unpublished Master's thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary 1947], p. 31)

How many of you have heard of **Harold Camping**? He is a radio and television broadcast host and president of [Family Stations, Inc.](#), a [California](#)-based ministry with worldwide broadcast facilities, including more than 150 outlets in the United States, as well as a [Web](#) site. He is known especially for his distinctive voice and his particular teachings. Camping teaches the Bible as the sole and authoritative word of God. He has authored about 30 books and booklets. Camping teaches that ALL churches have become apostate and thus must be abandoned. In the place of church he encourages personal Bible study and listening to his Family Radio broadcasts.



right is the home page of his web site.

Listen to me believers. **There is nothing new in the New Testament.** Everything that Paul, and all its writers, taught was nothing but what the Hebrew Scriptures taught would happen. All the promises that God gave to Israel are fulfilled in the Church, because the Church is the true Israel of God. The promises of God made to Old Covenant Israel are "fulfilled" in the Church of Jesus Christ, which is true Israel. Covenant, not race, has always been the defining mark of the true Israel.

Paul explains the gospel in the context of its base in the original covenant that God made with man. Whether you go to [Genesis 3:15](#) at the beginning and talk about the seed of the woman or you go to [Malachi 4:2](#) at the end and talk about the Son of righteousness who rises with healing in His wings, or anywhere in between, you will find the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul quotes the First Testament 61 times in Romans. He indicated that the Jewish scriptures were consistently referring to Jesus as the Messiah who would take away the sins of the world.

In Romans Paul quotes Moses, he quotes Hosea, Isaiah, David, the Psalms; and he shows familiarity with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He quotes Malachi, Jeremiah and he alludes to Daniel. He quotes from Joel chapter 2, Nahum chapter 1. He refers to 1 Samuel, refers to 1 Kings, and builds on Ezekiel 37. His thoughts constantly intersect with the First Testament.

There are at least 332 prophecies in the First Testament referring to Christ, most of which were fulfilled in His first coming.



The First Testament is literally loaded with truth, laying out the ground work for the coming of the New.

An unknown writer put it this way:

"I find my Lord in the Bible wherever I chance to look. He is the theme of the Bible, the center and heart of the book. He is the Rose of Sharon. He is the lily fair. Wherever I open my Bible, the Lord of the book is there. He at the book's beginning gave to the earth its form. He is the arch of shelter bearing the brunt of the storm, the burning bush of the desert, the budding of Aaron's rod. Wherever I look in the Bible, I see the Son of God. The ram upon Mount Miriah, the ladder from earth to sky, the scarlet cord in the window and the serpent lifted high, the smitten rock in the desert, the shepherd with staff and crook, the face of my Lord I discover wherever I look in the book. He is the seed of the woman, the Savior virgin born. He is the Son of David with whom men rejected with scorn. His garments of grace and of beauty, the stately Aaron deck, yet He is a priest forever, for He is of Melchizedek. Lord of eternal glory whom John the Apostle saw, light of the golden city, lamb without spot or flaw. Bridegroom coming at midnight for whom the virgins look; wherever I open my Bible I find my Lord in the book."

which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, Romans 1:2 NASB

Notice that Paul calls the Scriptures holy. They're not authored by men. They are not designed by men. They do not reflect the thinking of men. The word **holy** is the Greek word [hagios](#) which means: "**consecrated or set apart**". These are God's very words set apart for the special purpose of revealing Himself to us and the plans He has to bring us to Himself.

These writings are set apart from all other writings and are one of a kind, because it is God who speaks in them. Read this verse carefully: "**He [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.**" God promised in the Scriptures. God is speaking in the Scriptures. That is what makes them holy. And that is why they demand our attention.



This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on October 24, 2010. Media #525.

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